

KARIMBA: THE SHIFTING BOUNDARIES OF A SACRED TRADITION

by

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Abstract: In Zimbabwe, urban musicians and educators often perceive karimba as a category of relatively small mbira that are used for secular entertainment. This notion is strongly influenced by the prominence of the Kwanongoma mbira, or *nyunga nyunga* mbira, a 15-key karimba that was first popularized by the Kwanongoma College of Music in the 1960s. Despite a wealth of research, very little has been written about karimba traditions around the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border that are associated with traditional religious practices. In this article, the author focuses on a type of karimba with more than 20 keys that shares much of the same repertoire with *matepe/madhebe/here* music in Rushinga, Mutoko, and Mudzi Districts in Zimbabwe and nearby regions in Central Mozambique. The author explores the connections between innovations of the Kwanongoma mbira and karimba traditions in the Northeast with examples from the International Library of African Music archival collections and her own ethnographic research. This article provides a foundation upon which others may further conduct research on karimba music and suggests possible directions for incorporating these findings into educational contexts.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, mbira, karimba, Kwanongoma, *matepe*, repatriation.

Introduction

Karimba is a diverse category used to describe a number of different types of mbira with a common core layout. Andrew Tracey's article, "The Original African Mbira?" (1972), outlines this diversity, which ranges from the 8-key kankobela in the northern part of Zimbabwe and southern Zambia to the more than 20 key Sena/Nyungwe type of instrument in Northeastern Zimbabwe and Central Mozambique. The "ka-" prefix refers to the class of small things; the name implies that this group of instruments is made up of relatively small mbira. The word "karimba" in contemporary Zimbabwean contexts often brings to mind one specific type: a 15-key mbira with a fixed, plywood resonator that was popularized by the Kwanongoma College of Music in the 1960s. Apart from a few references in the academic literature (Tracey 1961, 1972), publications about this karimba tend to begin with the Kwanongoma era and then branch into various educational and commercial contexts within urban Zimbabwe and abroad. Notable publications include instructional booklets on how to teach and play the basics (Tracey 1961, Maraire 1991, Mutekwa 2017), information on how to build the Kwanongoma mbira (Jones 1992, Berliner 1993) and portraits of influential musicians such as Jenge Tapera, Dumisani Maraire, Chiwoniso Maraire and Hope Masike. Despite

a wealth of research, there is very little written about the diverse karimba traditions from the Zimbabwe-Mozambique borderlands that served as the inspiration for the Kwanongoma mbira.

Owing to its widespread use in educational contexts, the story that is told about the Kwanongoma mbira has an impact on the public perception of karimba music cultures more generally. Zimbabwean musician, Jege Taper, provided the prototype for the Kwanongoma mbira and its repertoire based on his experiences while learning from Nyungwe musicians in Tete Province of Mozambique during the 1930s (Tracey 1961: 44). Taper and Andrew Tracey added two keys to the mbira that was in line with Taper's observations of other karimba from around Tete (*ibid.*). Sheasby Matiore notes that thereafter "very few changes were made to [the instrument]" when it was brought to Kwanongoma, which included a slight adjustment to the tuning and a sturdy wooden resonator in place of the gourd *deze* for use in classrooms (2008: 85). In line with Kwanongoma's agenda to create a modern national instrument with traditional elements (see Jones 2012), the Kwanongoma mbira was branded as a modern instrument for the classroom. This branding in part depended on the origin story of the instrument, which emphasized its secular nature. As such, karimba in general is now widely perceived as a secular instrument that is not associated with traditional religious practices.

In this article I address the spiritual associations of karimba in an attempt to broaden this narrative through case studies and historical accounts. Here I focus on a type of karimba that typically has 20 or more keys and is commonly played with *matepe* mbira. It is my primary intention to provide resources for this karimba as a basis for further research and inquiry. To achieve this endeavour I engage with Hugh and Andrew Tracey's archival materials alongside my own ethnographic research that took place in Zimbabwe's Northeastern borderlands. I begin with my main reference point, which is the relationship between *matepe* and karimba.

I was introduced to the Kwanongoma mbira, and Zimbabwean music generally, in 2007 by Zimbabwe College of Music alumnus and ethnomusicologist, Tendai Muparutsa. At my first Zimfest in 2008 in Tacoma, Washington (after about 9 months of learning in Northern Idaho), I noticed among the larger North American Zimbabwean music community that the attitude towards karimba was most often one of dismissal: *The karimba is only for entertainment; it is not associated with spirits; It's easy to learn; It is meant for short-cycle tunes; It works well with children's songs.*¹ Several years later, when I began my dissertation work on *matepe dzemhondoro*, I encountered the opposite attitude towards this kind of mbira: *Matepe is based in the rural borderlands; there are few people who can still play; it is deeply spiritual; the tunings are "authentic" and "original"*.

During my field research in Northeastern Zimbabwe in 2016-2017, I learned that to gain a deep understanding of the *matepe* mbira one must also know karimba. At first,

¹ These encounters parallel Angela Scharfenberger's experiences in the USA of learning to perform on the karimba. She writes about how the 15-key karimba is viewed primarily as an educational tool based on its associations to Kwanongoma College (2017: 89).

I held on to my biases. I assumed the relationship was sequential, as perhaps one gains proficiency on karimba before learning the allegedly more complex *matepe*. While some musicians may very well learn how to play karimba before they attempt the *matepe*, players' stories from past and present vastly complicate the notion of karimba as a "young man's instrument" (Tracey 1961: 45) that is played primarily for entertainment.

Andrew Tracey hints at the close ties between *matepe* and karimba when he states that "the *karimbas* at Mkota were substantially at the same pitch as the *matepes*, and could be played together with them" (*italics in original*) (1970: 46). He further indicates that the karimba, more specifically the version with more than 20 keys, "may be used in ritual" (2015: 129). Preliminary archive work revealed that *matepe* and karimba often have the same number of keys. There is no consistent difference in size between the two types of mbira, and the low range of the karimba rivals that of *matepe's* characteristic deep sound. This initial work prompted dozens of questions about the relationship between these two instruments, the spiritual ties of karimba, its current state of affairs, the playing patterns, vocal lines, tunings, players, and builders.

This type of karimba shares much of the same repertoire with *matepe/madhebhel/hera* music in Rushinga, Mutoko, and Mudzi Districts in Zimbabwe and nearby regions in Central Mozambique. The instrument is played for both entertainment and traditional religious ceremonies. The role of karimba in traditional, religious practices occupies a small and shadowy corner of the literature in the form of a few brief sentences. Most of the attention to this instrument is in Andrew Tracey's publications (1961, 1970, 2015), which has carried over from the two earlier publications into brief mentions in the work of Berliner (1978) and Jones (1992). For example, Paul Berliner states that the larger types of karimba "are not limited to the somewhat restrictive musical structure of the smaller instruments and are used for playing the important ritual pieces associated with the ancestral spirits" (1978: 33). He refers to the heptatonic scale and additional pairs of notes of that type of karimba that provide more options to play long-cycle songs² used in religious ceremonies. As mentioned below, these distinctions are often in the form of a few key notes on the instrument.

The statements from Andrew Tracey to Berliner and Jones provide a point of departure from which to untangle popular notions of karimba as a secular instrument. It is not to say that this label is necessarily incorrect, as it carries positive and negative associations depending on its use. The repeated account of karimba as a secular instrument affords the Kwanongoma mbira and its relatives greater mobility within various urban educational and church contexts, while at the same time it manifests an attitude of inferiority to *mbira nhare* and *matepe dzemhondoro*. I suggest that the sacred/secular boundaries of these narratives deserve critical examination in order to better understand how concepts of tradition and modernity are constructed in the imagination of Zimbabwean musicians. An initial question into this inquiry may be, what is at stake when we re-associate karimba to spiritual practices? As musicians add

² I use the phrase "long-cycle songs" to refer to mbira songs with a cycle length of 48 pulses or more.

keys to the Kwanongoma mbira to increase its functionality and compatibility with *mbira nhare*, they also leverage the secular associations of the instrument such that it can be played in a variety of contexts. As discussed, these new designs then come to resemble the expanded key layouts of karimba from the Northeastern borderlands.

Methods

My dissertation research in 2016 and 2017 was centered on the repatriation of nearly 500 audio recordings and accompanying photographs from the International Library of African Music (ILAM) that feature music traditions of Northeastern Zimbabwe and Central Mozambique. These recordings included *matepe*, *madhebehe*, *hera* and karimba players from these regions, as well as *nyanga* and *ngororombe* panpipe ensembles, drum ensembles, *nyonga nyonga* and *mana embudzi* mbira, *valimba* xylophone, and *bangwe* zither players who were recorded by Hugh and Andrew Tracey from 1933 to 1973.

The initial stage of the project was three months of archival work at ILAM at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa.³ I was required to peruse the ILAM collections by hand, as many of the resources were not available through the archive's searchable database. The resources included recordings, photographs, films, transcriptions, field cards, journals, letters and maps. The Tracey Instrument Collection at ILAM was also a key resource that allowed me to learn transcriptions on various types of mbira from the Northeast in a variety of tunings. Another essential source for this project was Andrew Tracey's Mbira Catalogue, an unpublished collection of photographs, tuning diagrams and notes from his 1993 field research in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. All these sources of information were grounded by conversations with Andrew and Heather Tracey, who were able to recall additional details about songs, people, and places based on their memories of recording trips to these areas.

The second stage of this project was conducted in Mudzi, Rushinga, Uzumba-Maramba-Pfungwe and Mutoko Districts as well as Harare and Chitungwiza. The daily research efforts were always collaborative, and I am indebted to all the contributors of this project who had vast levels of drive and interest in undertaking this field research. Among these collaborators was Mr. Kudakwashe Nyaruwabvu, who led the research in Mutoko District and provided valuable insights as a culture-bearer and mbira player from that area. The research in Mudzi District was conducted with three expert musicians from the Zonke-Tsonga family who regularly perform *matepe* music and traditional drum and dance styles in their area. This included Sekuru Anthony Zonke,

³ The archival work was a group effort and I could not have accomplished this stage of the project alone. It is the support of the ILAM staff, the archival expertise of Elijah Madiba, the guidance of Andrew and Heather Tracey, the conversations with Mandy and Christian Carver, the dedication of Elizabeth Mdlongwa, and the moral support of Lee Watkins and Diane Thram that made this work possible. Lastly, I am indebted to my husband, Zack Moon, who conducted much of the archival research. In addition, I am incredibly grateful for the support of the Fulbright Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship, and the Association for Recorded Sound Collections and the Ottenberg-Winans Fellowship from the University of Washington African Studies Program. These funders made both the archival and field research portions of the project possible.

who is *sabhuku*, or village head, of Tsonga village near the Nyamapanda border post and my main mbira teacher. Also on “team *matepe*,” as we called ourselves, was Sekuru’s son, Tichaona Crispin Zonke and Sekuru’s brother, Mr. Boyi Nyamande, who was Councilor of Mudzi District at the time of this project and is now Chief Goronga. My husband, Zack Moon, also played an integral role in these research activities as part of the team.

Altogether, our main objective was to connect with musicians from the Northeast and repatriate the archival recordings and accompanying photographs. We conducted group interviews that incorporated listening and viewing sessions of archival materials. The most rewarding and insightful part of the research took place during impromptu music making sessions with the people we visited. We always carried a pair of *hosho* and at least two mbira that were in-tune with one another so we were able to sing, dance and play mbira with musicians and their families.

In the ILAM archives

Hugh and Andrew Tracey most consistently refer to the larger type of karimba that is associated with spirits as the Nyungwe karimba, so named because of its ties to the Nyungwe peoples in Mozambique (H. Tracey Carnegie Report; A. Tracey 1961, 1972, 2015). Most musicians I met from the Northeastern borderlands prefer the label, karimba, but also use *kalimba*, *marimba* and/or *malimba*. In this way, it is important to distinguish that the label “Nyungwe karimba,” as well as “South bank karimba,” function primarily as academic terms and are useful when searching through Hugh Tracey’s Carnegie report, Andrew Tracey’s publications or the ILAM collection of photos, instruments, diagrams and notes, in general.

I do not adopt this label because it can be somewhat misleading. First, there is a lot of variation in what may qualify as a Nyungwe karimba. For instance, the name Nyungwe may strike a familiar chord for those who play the Kwanongoma mbira, which has come to be called the *nyunga nyunga* mbira. Sheasby Matiure reports that this label is Dumisani Maraire’s adaptation of what Jege Tapera called the *nyungwe nyungwe* mbira. Jege Tapera coined this term to signify that he obtained and learned this instrument from Nyungwe musicians in Mozambique (Matiure 2008: 85). The reader should note that *nyunga nyunga* persists as the most widely accepted name for the Kwanongoma mbira. This is the first level of confusion, that the name of the popular *nyunga nyunga* mbira, that is, the 15-key karimba, is derived from the same descriptor that Tracey calls Nyungwe karimba, that is, the big karimba, which does not work well to distinguish the two. Furthermore, the larger karimba is widespread throughout Northeastern Zimbabwe and Central Mozambique and is played by a number of different groups—the Korekore/Tavara, Marembe, Sena, and Budya⁴—in addition to the Nyungwe. These groups also play *matepe*, *madhebehe* and/or *hera* (depending on the area) as well as other types of mbira. Indeed, in this core region of “mbira country,” as Andrew Tracey puts

⁴ I use the accepted spelling “Budya” to denote this ethnic group for consistency; however, the most common pronunciation of the term within the Mutoko area among Budya musicians is “Buja,” which reflects a difference in dialect.

it (2015: 128), the types of mbira are diverse and overlapping and are often played with one another in creative ways (Kubik 1964, Tracey 1972).

Photographs taken by Hugh Tracey during his survey of Shona music in 1932 demonstrates this especially well. The first image is of four men playing mbira together in Tete District, Mozambique (Figure 1a). The second photograph is a close-up that features their four mbira (Figure 1b). There is a 25-key karimba positioned above four other types of mbira: *njari*, *nyonga nyonga* (different than the *nyunga nyunga*), and *mana embudzi*. The design of each instrument is quite similar: the slender arch of the keys, the hollow sound boards, the shell buzzers, and the design work etched into the metal bridges. If one squints past the shadows one can see how each of them has a different key layout. This includes the left-to-right slope of the *mana embudzi* keys, the long bass notes on the right-hand side of the *nyonga nyonga*, and the many layers of *njari* registers.



Figure 1a. Four MaNyungwe men playing the instruments in Figure 1b. Tete District, Mozambique, 1932. Photo by Hugh Tracey.



Figure 1b. Karimba (top), *njari* (left), *nyonga nyonga* (center), *mana embudzi* (right). Tete District, Mozambique, 1932. Photo by Hugh Tracey.

I highlight this example to emphasize that karimba is not one musical tradition, but instead moves in tandem with other mbira, panpipe, vocal, and drum and dance styles in the areas where it is played. It is therefore misleading to classify this kind of mbira in the typical fashion that aligns the instrument to a specific region and/or ethnic group. Although I have painted broad strokes to illustrate these associations, I find it useful

to highlight the widespread distribution of this type of karimba in order to stress its diversity and adaptability over a large area as played by many groups of people. In the following section I provide guidelines to characterize the larger type of karimba based on its construction, key layout, common repertoire, and its relationship to traditional, religious practices.

Zondani Chinyama's mbira in Figure 2 is an example of this type of karimba. Andrew Tracey met Chinyama at the Mazoe Bridge Refugee Camp in Mt. Darwin, Zimbabwe in 1993 and notes that he used the label *karimba nkuru* (or "big small mbira") to describe his instrument (Tracey Mbira Catalogue, 1993). The mbira is associated with the spirits. Andrew Tracey writes that "if someone was sick they could call [Chinyama] to play. He would fix their *azimu*" (*ibid.*). This is supported by the fact that Chinyama played a number of traditional *hera* songs such as "*Mbopa uranda*," and "*Kuvachenjedza*," as well as *matepe* songs such as "*Siti*," and "*Nzou ichidya mushonga*" (*ibid.*). Furthermore, Andrew Tracey states that this instrument "sounds much like a *hera*," because its overtones are tuned to one another just as *hera* and *matepe* are tuned (*ibid.*).

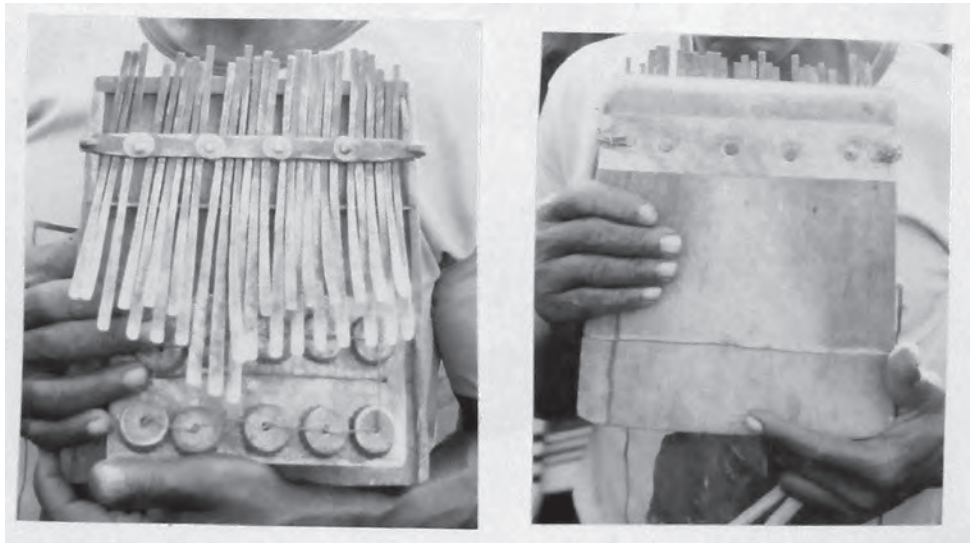


Figure 2. *Karimba nkuru* of Zondani Chinyama, built by Ruiz Chinyama. Mazoe Bridge Refugee Camp, 7 August 1993. Photos by Andrew Tracey.

One can determine the basic layout of this type of karimba in Figure 3. The several instruments I chose to include here are Chinyama's *karimba nkuru*, Johani Chiyeha Bandeira's karimba from the Tracey Instrument Collection, and one from the National Gallery in Harare. On all three the bass notes are clustered together in the center of the instrument. If one calls the lowest note the first scale degree, then these bass notes include 1, 3, 4, and sometimes 2. I refer to scale degree as a way for the reader to more easily visualize the intervals of the mbira layout, but I do not mean to imply that

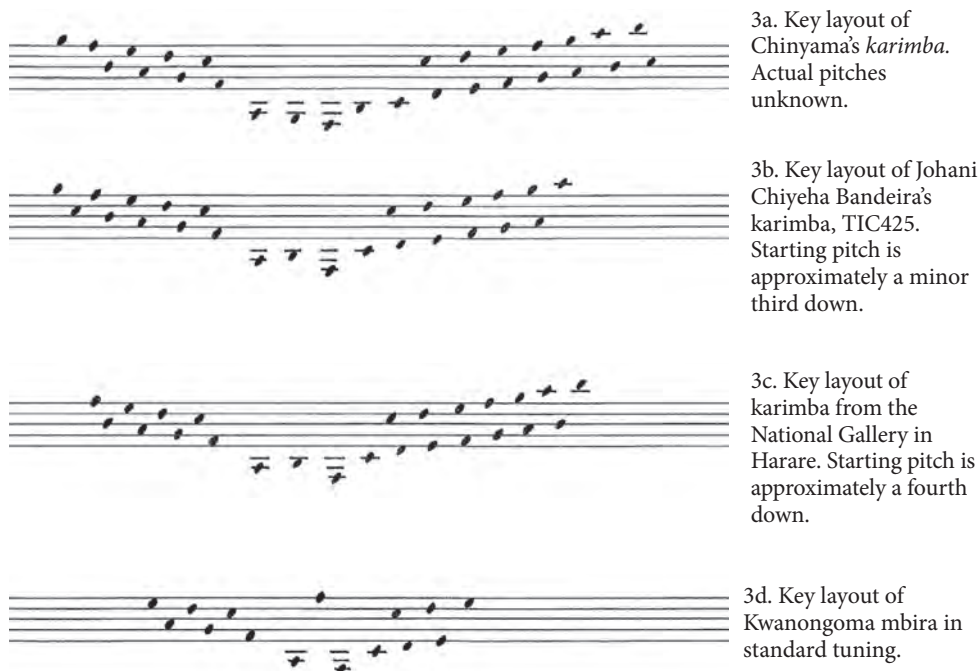


Figure 3a-d. These four diagrams compare the key layout and range of four *karimba*. The first three diagrams are based on Andrew Tracey's notes from the 1993 *Mbira Catalogue*. I chose a low F as the starting note for comparison purposes. All diagrams by Author.

the instrument is in a specific key or that these notes serve a specific scalar function. The bass note that is situated in the center of the instrument is the low fourth degree, perched in the upper register above the other bass notes for easy reach by the right-hand thumb. The scale then extends up from there on the right-hand side of the instrument, beginning with the fifth degree, step-wise in an ascending scale. Each note on the right-hand side is paired with its octave equivalent which then constitutes the higher register on the upper right-hand side of the mbira. Beginning an octave up from the lowest bass note, the mid-register on the left-hand side reinforces this ascending scale. The upper register on the left-hand side of the instrument mirrors the upper register on the right-hand side in lieu of more octave pairs. For comparison, I include a diagram of the Kwanongoma mbira in Figure 3d. The basic structure is very similar with only two bass notes and a less extended scale.

The *karimba* in Figure 3 have the same basic layout with a few variations. The bass notes in the center of the instrument vary slightly with the addition of the second degree, the scale on the right ascends 6 to 8 notes, and to the left from 4 to 5 notes. In fact, among all the *karimba* I have come across, no two instruments have the same key layout, apart from two *karimba* we commissioned Mr. Enoch Nyazvigo to build in 2017, as discussed in the next section. It is difficult to surmise the significance of these variations from the

archival resources at hand, which are based on brief encounters with karimba players. Unfortunately, the audio recordings that accompany these indexes from 1993 are also misplaced. Textual and visual evidence are the only available information.

It does seem apparent from Andrew Tracey's notes that this big karimba is not the only one associated with traditional, religious practices. For instance, brothers Antonio Dulezhi and Abilio Dulezhi are featured in Tracey's Mbira Catalogue with a different type of karimba that has more than 20 keys. Notice the distinct circular-shaped sound board and small gourd resonator in contrast to the flattened bell-shaped sound board (Figure 4a & b). These characteristics, along with the double register of keys, are descriptive of what Andrew Tracey (1972) and Blacking (1961) identify as a Nsenga-type of mbira. The brothers called their instrument karimba, but agreed that it was also called *kandimu* (Tracey Mbira Catalogue, 1993). In comparison to the karimba in Figure 3, the key layout includes a high middle note that is present on the Kwanongoma mbira, an outlying bass note and a more sporadic upper register (Figure 4c). The Dulezhi brothers' *kandimu* is not merely a contrasting example of a big karimba as these two brothers played with their uncle, the *karimba nkuru* player, Zondani Chinyama. The songs they played included "all the standard *hera* repertoire," as mentioned above (Tracey Mbira Catalogue, 1993).

One essential element that one cannot gather from the photographs and key

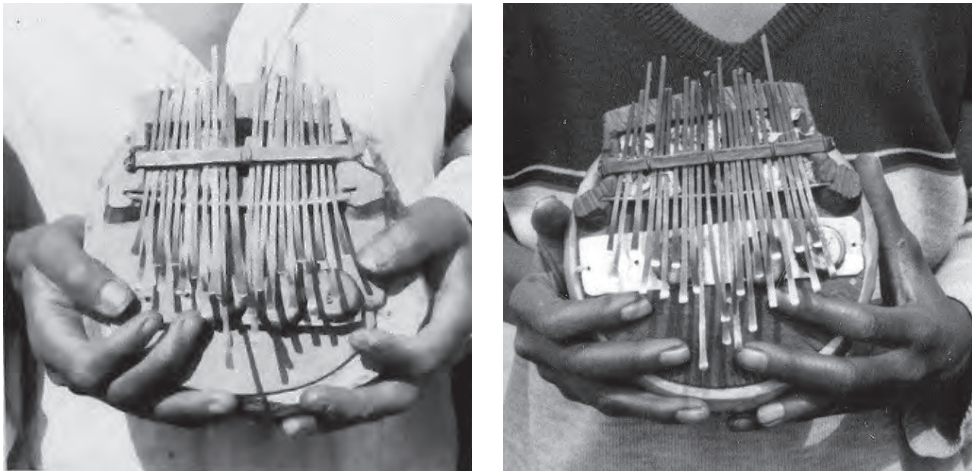


Figure 4a & b. Abilio Dulezhi (a) and Antoni Dulezhi (b) with their karimba. Mazoe Bridge Refugee Camp, Mt. Darwin, Zimbabwe, 1993. Photos by Andrew Tracey.



4c. Key layout of Antonio Dulezhi's instrument, with only one note difference from Abilio Dulezhi's instrument, which does not include the note shown in parenthesis. Diagram by author based on Andrew Tracey's notes from the Mbira Catalogue.

diagrams alone are details of tuning and scale. My first encounter with the big karimba was at the International Library of African Music in 2016 where there are several of these larger karimba in the Tracey Instrument Collection, including #157, #158 and #425, which are all individually in-tune and playable (Figure 5).

The first two were acquired by Hugh Tracey in Mozambique (then Portuguese East Africa) during the early 1930s and the third one Andrew Tracey purchased from karimba player, Johani Chiyeha Bandeira of Nyamapanda, Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) in the late 1960s.

The only karimba transcriptions that we were able to find during my initial three months at ILAM were the songs, “*Karimuchipfuwa*” (In the heart) (Figure 6) and “*Kadya hove kuna Mazowe*,” (I am going to Mazowe to eat fish) based on Johani Chiyeha Bandeira’s playing.

During my time at ILAM, I learned how to play “*Karimuchipfuwa*” using the karimba from the Tracey Instrument Collection, the transcription below (Figure 6) and Andrew Tracey’s 1969 recordings of Joahni Chiyeha Bandeira with vocalist Sinati Nyamande and *matepe* player, Thomas Dzamwarira. I thought this would be an interesting

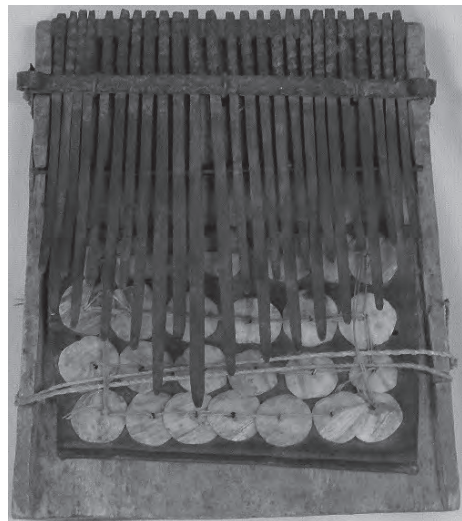


Figure 5. TIC157, TIC158 and TIC 425. Photos by Stefan Franke.



Figure 6. One cycle of “*Karimuchipfuwa*,” based on Johani Chiyeha Bandeira’s playing in 1969, which was transcribed by Andrew Tracey. This transcription corresponds to the key layout of Bandeira’s instrument in Figure 3b. Transcription by Author.

exercise, as I have played Kwanongoma mbira for over a decade and assumed that the larger karimba would feel quite familiar to me. This was certainly a false assumption.

The big karimba from the collection are similar to *matepe*. The soundboard is made from the soft and resonant *mupepe* wood and hollowed-out in a flattened bell-shape. The thin keys are attached to an ornamented bridge and then curve upward in a dramatic arch. The depth of space is far more expansive in comparison to the Kwanongoma mbira, which has relatively straight keys and a solid, flat soundboard. Consequently, as when playing a *matepe*, one’s hands feel open as the thumb and forefinger must reach to pluck the keys that extend out and up towards the player. According to Andrew Tracey’s notes, the player’s right-hand index finger can pluck the upper register up or down, as the layout allows for either (Tracey Mbira Catalogue, 1993).

Based on the transcriptions of Bandeira’s karimba lines, I found the playing patterns of the larger karimba strikingly unfamiliar. The most significant difference is the role of the right thumb that is responsible for playing all three bass notes in the center of the instrument.⁵ This includes reaching over the lowest, longest note to pluck the third scale degree with the right thumb. The left-hand thumb is then more active in producing the high lines. For example, in the transcription of “*Karimuchipfuwa*” (Figure 6) one can see how the left hand emphasizes the high lines with repeated double notes in succession, while the right-hand patterns consist of bass notes that alternate with blocked and broken octaves to produce complementary middle and low lines.

It should be noted that although playing the *matepe* repertoire on the karimba feels

⁵ Andrew Tracey’s diagram from his 1972 article seems to incorrectly show that the left-hand thumb is responsible for half of these bass notes. Evidence from Andrew Tracey’s later transcriptions and notes, as well as the playing style of present-day karimba player, Mr. Nyamusangudza, demonstrate that the right thumb plays the bass notes.

altogether unfamiliar, a new skill that needs time to settle in, it is also possible to play this instrument as if it were an extended Kwanongoma mbira. To do this, one must ignore the center key, which is a bass note on the big karimba and a high note on the Kwanongoma mbira, as shown in Figure 3. One can then play songs commonly taught on the Kwanongoma mbira, such as “*Chemutengure*” and “*Bhutsu mutandarika*,” on the larger karimba. Long-cycle songs such as “*Taireva*” and “*Mukatiende*” can also be expanded on the extended keyboard of big karimba by adding the fourth degree where appropriate. The similarities in key layout allow for these experimental crossings and demonstrate the close relationship between the Kwanongoma mbira and the karimba with 20 or more keys.

A more in-depth analysis is needed to better understand the playing styles of various karimba musicians. Of note are a collection of transcriptions of Raison Kanakombizi of Marymount Mission in Rushinga District, including a diagram of the note layout of his instrument and corresponding solo recordings of six songs. There are at least four karimba players in addition to Kanakombizi and Bandeira that are featured in ILAM recordings (see Appendix). My hope is that the reader will be inspired to utilize the resources at hand to investigate these songs in further detail.

In the borderlands

During my field research in 2016–17, my main research focused on the *matepe* mbira and its regional variations, including *hera* and *madhebehe*. In nearly all the instances in which we talked to *matepe*, *madhebehe* or *hera* players from Mudzi, Mutoko and Rushinga districts, there was always mention of someone who played karimba. Names were sometimes forgotten, players passed away or relocated, and in some cases instruments were washed away by floods or purposefully burned by players who joined a church where the instrument was not accepted. It was therefore difficult to investigate the traditions of karimba players in these regions. As such, I would like to mention three karimba players, a vocalist, and an instrument builder of note whom I met during my time in Northeastern Zimbabwe.

Recall Johani Chiyeha Bandeira, Thomas Dzamwarira and Sinati Kadende who were recorded by Andrew Tracey in Nyamapanda in 1969. On my first visit to Nyamapanda in 2014 I met Sinati Nyamande, unaware that she was the same woman in the 1969 recordings with the incredible yodelling, vocal lines. This was despite the fact that she inquired about a *murungu*⁶ who recorded her decades ago and asked if we could bring those tracks to her. Based on this inquiry, Sinati Nyamande inspired the entire repatriation project that formed the basis of my dissertation work. It was not until March 2017 that we were able to sit and listen to the recordings and confirm that the woman listed in the metadata as Sinati Kadende is in fact Sinati Nyamande.

Nyamande said she recognized her own voice in the recordings but had very vague memories of the actual recording sessions. She recounted that the *matepe* player,

⁶ ChiShona term which means “white man” or “English speaker”.

Thomas Dzamwarira, was a visitor in Nyamapanda on that day and she did not know him well. Johani Chiyeha Bandeira was a resident of Nyamapanda and Sinati Nyamande sang with him often at informal gatherings as well as ceremonial functions. Now, as the mother and grandmother of a family of *matepe* players, she regularly sings these same songs with *matepe* accompaniment. She used to travel with her son, Anthony Zonke, to play at ceremonies and is still an active participant in the music making at home in Tsonga Village. It is not surprising, then, that the repertoire her family plays on *matepe* is a continuation of what she learned while singing with karimba. Her family's singing style and rattle patterns are noticeably inspired by her expertise, which is most apparent when her grandson, Crispen Zonke, sings her high lines in unison falsetto.

We did not have the opportunity to speak to the karimba player, Johani Chiyeha Bandeira, who died in the early 2000s, but we were able to meet his son, Alec Bandeira. Bandeira lives in Nyamapanda and works as a welder near the shops. He learned to play karimba by watching his father, but his relationship to mbira is somewhat conflicted. Bandeira became a pastor for the local Pentecostal Church under ZAOGA (Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa) at the Nyamapanda shops in 1993. He explained that although mbira is theoretically allowed in the church, its presence is still controversial, and often avoided. If mbira is played for church, Bandeira notes that "only God's music" rather than the traditional repertoire is allowed (Interview, 27 August 2017). The church songs are short-cycle tunes that have their own appeal, but are distinct from the long-cycle songs characteristic of karimba in that area.

In August 2017 I met karimba player, Mr. Everisto Mupadzi, at his home outside Kotwa. When we travelled to see Mupadzi, he told us that we may not want to speak to him after all, as he joined the Mugodhi Pentecostal Church in 1980 and left karimba at that time (Interview, 9 August 2017). Although he never played for religious ceremonies when he was young, the church asked him to burn his mbira when he became an official member. He recalls that this was not difficult for him since he was ready to adopt a new lifestyle that did not include the excessive drinking and late nights away from home that went along with his mbira playing. Mupadzi told us that he still enjoys mbira music and accepted the archival recordings that we offered with little reservation. He claimed that he could listen to mbira through the recordings without any internal conflict. As long as the instrument itself was not present he would not be tempted to play.

We came across only one person, Mr. Chikinya Nyamusangudza, who still regularly plays karimba. He lives near Mhopoti Mountain, South of the Mazowe river border to Rushinga District. His brother apparently also plays karimba, but we did not have a chance to meet him on the day we were there. Nyamusangudza told us that he was called to play during the Zimbabwean Liberation War, along with another comrade, a *matepe* player, who had recently died (Interview, 26 June 2017). Now he plays karimba with his brother and used to travel to Rushinga district to play with a *hera* player named Black. Nyamusangudza said playing for the spirits brings him happiness, and although there have not been *mhondoro* spirit ceremonies in that area for some time, playing alone for Mbuya Nehanda's spirit satisfies this purpose for him. His father also played

karimba and he tested out *matepe* for a while before settling on this type of mbira. He revealed that he likes to groove on one song for a while; perhaps the whole night he will explore a single song. On another day, another occasion, he may find a liking to a different song and play that one for an extended time. The songs he knows are the same ones that we know from playing *matepe*. I could not tell the difference one way or another as to how they lined up, but on hearing the karimba lines the other members of the research team (the Zonke-Tsonga family musicians) easily identified each tune.

The design of Nyamusangudza's mbira (Figure 7) looked oddly familiar, much like the other *matepe* that we have seen in Mudzi District despite its unusually thin keys. It turns out that Mr. Enoch Nyazvigo, a Nyamapanda resident, built this karimba about 35 years ago. Nyazvigo (these days known as Kasando, or "little hammer"), is the only *matepe* builder we know of in Mudzi district. We had come across several players such as Garaji Nyamutya (who is featured on the *Soul of Mbira* album) who have *matepe* built by Kasando from decades ago. It was surprising that he was a prolific builder of karimba as well as *matepe* in that region. We made our usual trek to Kasando's place near Nyamapanda by the Magwada dam and the foothills of Nyamhara Mountain to inquire about this.

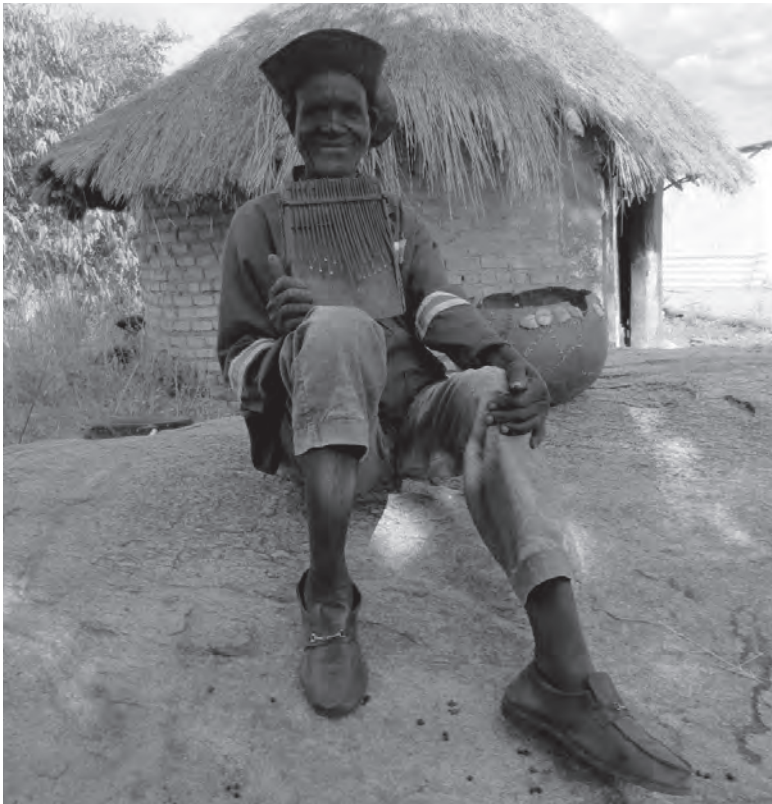


Figure 7. Mr. Chikinya Nyamusangudza and his karimba. Photo by Zack Moon.

Whenever we would ask Kasando about “karimba,” he would reply with references to “*marimba*” or “*malimba*,”⁷ suggesting that it is not necessarily conceptualized as a smaller kind of mbira. That is to say, the prefix “ka-” refers to something small and the prefix “ma-” to something large. In Figure 8 one can see among the instruments he built that there is a clear distinction in size between the karimba and the *matepe*. But Nyamusangudza’s instrument, which he built 35 years prior, is closer to the size of the *matepe* mbira featured in the photo than the karimba. One possible explanation to these differences in size is that I asked him to build several “karimba.” If instead we had used his label of “*marimba*”/“*malimba*” I wonder if he would have built them any bigger. It was possible to ask him these questions directly, but the answer was not ever straightforward; Kasando is in his 90s and tended to take the conversation in interesting directions as he recalled decades of memories building and playing mbira in the Northeast.

One of the karimba shown in Figure 8 was adopted by Alec Bandeira, who now plays



Figure 8. Karimba (below) and *matepe* (above) built by Mr. Enoch Nyazvigo, July 2017. Photo by Author.

⁷ Nyazvigo would sometimes say “*marimba*” and other times “*malimba*”. Many musicians in the area also frequently interchanged “r” and “l”. This reflects the language diversity in the borderlands, including local dialects of Shona along with the Marembe and Nyungwe languages.

during his downtime while at work. In a follow-up trip to Nyamapanda in August, 2018, Bandeira demonstrated a couple of songs that he has been working on. He relayed that the flash drive we gave him the year prior helps him to remember some of the songs that he used to play. He listens to the recorded materials at home and does not feel conflicted when playing traditional music outside church contexts (Interview, 30 August 2018).

Kwanongoma connections

In this last section I touch upon the associations of the Kwanongoma mbira (and its descendants) as secular and invented and investigate the boundedness of these associations based on evidence about the larger karimba. The examples from the musicians I highlighted in the previous section demonstrate that the spiritual and secular boundaries of the karimba are highly variable, depending on the individual and the social contexts in which they play. For instance, Alec Bandeira emphasizes a distinction between secular and sacred repertoire, while Everisto Mupadzi focuses on the spiritual associations of the instrument itself. These diverse opinions make up a range of experiences that define karimba in many ways, not unlike individual approaches to *matepe* music within and beyond the Northeastern borderlands.

Claire Jones' analysis on the development of the Kwanongoma marimba⁸ sheds light on the secular and modern associations of the Kwanongoma mbira. Although the marimba and karimba are conceived of very differently by diverse Zimbabwean audiences, Jones adds that the "marimba and (secondarily) the karimba, the two instruments chosen and developed for teaching at [Kwanongoma] College, remain the primary African instruments in Zimbabwean educational institutions" (*ibid.*: 45). She highlights the role of the colonial and postcolonial education systems in popularizing the Zimbabwean marimba and contributing to its dynamic status as a kind of "modern tradition" on the national stage (2012). Jones affirms that the karimba also fit the bill as a candidate for a national instrument in part because it was less associated with spirit practices than *mbira nhare* and *matepe* (37). For the remainder of this article I turn my attention to the impact of these characterizations.

The modern, secular ties of the Kwanongoma mbira has afforded it a certain amount of mobility within school, church and commercial contexts and allowed players and builders a sense of freedom to innovate, compose and create in a way that is not tied down to preservationist notions of tradition. For example, Perminus Matiure of Midlands State University developed an ensemble with three "hybrid" Kwanongoma-style mbira that have 19, 17, and 14 keys, respectively, in order to expand the high, middle and low registers of the karimba (Ngomani 2016). The way Matiure incorporates multiple mbira with overlapping ranges echoes the orchestra style of Mbira dzeNharira, a Harare-based electric mbira band that draws on traditional spiritual imagery in their performances. Matiure explained in an interview with *The Herald* that an advantage of the karimba

⁸ In the previous section, "*marimba*" is described as another name for karimba, but here the Kwanongoma marimba is in reference to the popular wooden xylophone.

is that they are “free from scepticism hence can accommodate everyone regardless of spiritual inclination” (*ibid.*). When asked about the effect of the modifications on the traditional aspects of the karimba, Matiure stressed the contemporary origins of the instrument, implying that little is at stake with these modifications (*ibid.*).

Matiure articulates the appeal of the Kwanongoma mbira as a modern innovation in that it is accessible to audiences of diverse religious orientations and provides instrument makers like himself certain freedoms to create new designs. These characterizations of what constitutes a modern instrument—one that is widely accessible and representative of tradition while also flexible to change—are in line with the modernist ideal that gave rise to the Kwanongoma mbira in the 1960s (Jones 2012). While having no doubt that mbira makers may feel unrestrained to develop the Kwanongoma mbira in various directions, I emphasize that builders of the larger type of karimba are also highly innovative even if the instrument is tied to traditional religious practices.

The variety of key layouts and designs illustrated in the archival and ethnographic evidence I present in this article demonstrate that ongoing innovation is an integral part of karimba music cultures in the borderlands. Andrew Tracey suggests that the open-ended scale on either side of the instrument lends itself to these kinds of modifications and helps to explain the amount of variability that exists in the number of keys (1972: 90). As musicians continue to expand and modify the karimba while using the Kwanongoma mbira as a point of departure, ongoing research provides a basis to connect to the knowledge of past and present designs among karimba players who are based in the borderlands.

To illustrate this point, one can see how recent innovations on the karimba resemble already existing instruments. For example, there is one karimba in the Tracey Instrument Collection from the Northeastern borderlands that has only 16 keys (although by the looks of it there is at least one key missing from the left-hand upper register). This instrument is similar to Tapera’s original mbira based on its small range and the absence of the high key in the very center of the instrument (1961). In contrast to Tapera’s karimba, TIC155 has the fourth scale degree on the left-hand lower register. Adding this note to the Kwanongoma mbira is a popular trend among musicians in Harare such as Jacob Mafuleni and Musekiwa Chingodza who primarily play *mbira nhare* (Figure 9).

Mr. Chaka Chawasarira, a well-known *matepe* player and instrument builder



Figure 9. Karimba collected by Hugh Tracey in 1933. TIC155. Photo by Stefan Franke.

based in Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe, popularized a 19-key karimba that he developed from the Kwanongoma mbira. During the times that I visited him in his home outside Harare, he often demonstrated the versatility of the 19-key karimba with the song, “*Chemutengure*”. He begins the patterns as a simple, straight-forward outline of a I-IV-I-V chord sequence in blocked chords. To do this he avoids playing the added three notes on the 19-key, which represents how the song is played on the 15-key Kwanongoma mbira. Chawasarira then describes how he developed the 19-key karimba while adding more intricate lines with alternating notes and variations that include the fourth degree of the scale. His story song weaves new variations with vocal lines as the story progresses. For example, one can hear through his playing how he aligns this expanded version of the song on karimba with renditions of “*Chemutengure*” that are played on *mbira nhare*.

Chawasarira is from Rushinga District where he learned how to play *matepe*.⁹ There are several recordings of Chawasarira with karimba player Raison Kanakombizi that were recorded by Andrew Tracey in Marymount Mission in 1971. Sure, they played together, Chawasarira recalls, but he never paid attention to the karimba because he was not very interested in it at the time. Consequently, his 19-key karimba is not an off-shoot of the big karimba from the Northeast, but an extension of the 15-key Kwanongoma mbira. His intention was to combine karimba and *mbira nhare* rather than karimba and *matepe* or *hera* as is common in the area where he grew up.

Although Chawasarira’s karimba has an expanded keyboard with the added fourth degree like many karimba from the Northeast, it is not stigmatized by any associations with traditional religious practices. Chawasarira is able to teach the karimba to school children because the instrument is predominantly viewed as secular. By contrast, the *matepe* is not accepted in Zimbabwean school and church contexts, both because classroom teaching methods have not been developed for this type of mbira and because it has strong spiritual associations. Chawasarira led a well-known performance ensemble featuring the 19-key karimba during his many years as headmaster of Zengea School outside Harare and has composed a variety of repertoire for church and school contexts on both the 19-key and Kwanongoma mbira. Although Chawasarira’s 19-key karimba reflects his own innovation, one can acknowledge the connection to the larger type of karimba that was played in Rushinga District. The intended compatibility with *mbira nhare* is apparent, too, as karimba player Chaka Chakandika learned how to play the 19-key version from Chawasarira at Zengea School and has since helped to popularize the instrument through his involvement with Mbira dzeNharira.

While these two examples demonstrate how the modern and secular associations of the Kwanongoma mbira provide certain mobilities in urban contexts, these associations may also contribute to the disconnection between institutionalized practices and karimba traditions in Northeastern Zimbabwe that are tied to traditional

⁹ Chawasarira now prefers to call the instrument *matepe*, however, it is commonly known in Rushinga District as *hera*.

religious practices. The story of the Kwanongoma mbira recounts that Tapera acquired his karimba and learned how to play beyond Zimbabwe's borders in Tete Province, Mozambique. Sheasby Matiure argues that these origins are not so foreign, considering the level of continuity that exists between ethnic groups in the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border region (2008: 85). In this article I have emphasized that karimba are widespread over a large area in the borderlands where they exhibit diversity in construction and are played by a number of different groups in a way that overlaps and intermingles with other mbira traditions. The story of the modern Kwanongoma mbira that is taught in schools may support new directions and creative practices among urban Zimbabwean musicians, but it does not illustrate the dynamic characteristics or innovative practices of karimba traditions in the Northeast. Consequently, I advocate for a more diverse view of karimba that is supported by the larger context of music traditions in the borderlands in order to highlight the fluid boundaries of karimba music and its range of expressions.

One afternoon in mid-August, our research team took a short drive from the Zonke homestead to the Nyamapanda Primary School to visit Mr. Nyamuhowa and his colleague, Mr. Patrick Musa. The two men teach music and dance at the Primary and Secondary School and have experimented with songs that mix *matepe* with Kwanongoma mbira. They came to our meeting with mbira in hand and played several tunes together. Musa is not originally from Mudzi District and learned to play Kwanongoma mbira at Masvingo Teachers' College in the late 1990s. Nyamuhowa plays *matepe* on a mbira he inherited from his father in the mid-1980s. Nyamuhowa said unfortunately he was not interested in learning how to play until his father passed, so although he is familiar with the sound of *matepe* songs such as "Siti," and "Kadya hove," he has not learned to play them and prefers short-cycle tunes that represent a more modern style.

Nyamuhowa and Musa see this as a mixture of the old (*matepe*) and the new (Kwanongoma mbira) and wondered about my reaction to this combination. The 1969 recording session between Johani Bandeira, Thomas Dzamwarira and Sinati Nyamande seamlessly combined *matepe* and karimba because they shared the same repertoire and their mbira were in-tune with each other. Now, although Nyamuhowa and Musa's duet required more initial adjustments to re-tune and create new songs from Kwanongoma-inspired repertoire, the karimba and *matepe* combination still parallels long standing practices from the Northeast. I tried to reassure Nyamuhowa and Musa that I support their creative musical endeavours even though I primarily study traditional *matepe* repertoire. However, I still could not help but leave that meeting with a concern for the relative invisibility of local karimba traditions within school contexts.

While Nyamuhowa leads an established and successful traditional dance programme in the Nyamapanda schools that incorporates national styles as well as local *mafuwe*, *nyakapini* and *jiti* dances, there are very few resources available that support the inclusivity of local mbira traditions in the classroom. The photos, recordings and corresponding metadata from ILAM that we provided the school are a step in this direction. Supporting educational materials are also needed to further integrate these resources into the classroom setting. ILAM and other archives have recognized the

importance of creating these types of materials to facilitate the repatriation of recordings in educational contexts. An example includes a textbook such as *Understanding African Music* (Carver 2012), which utilizes ILAM recordings to explore music cultures from sub-Saharan Africa. The Association for Cultural Equity also has a variety of open access lesson plans available on their website that allow educators to more easily use the recordings from the Alan Lomax Archive (<http://www.culturalequity.org/resources/for-educators>).

The Kwanongoma mbira has been a part of educational contexts in Zimbabwe for decades and presents a valuable opportunity to learn about the connections between diverse styles of karimba music. The research presented in this article provides a model and a foundation for musicians and researchers to pursue further ethnographic and archival research into karimba traditions. There is also a clear need for ethnographic research in Mozambique, as my studies thus far have been limited to the Zimbabwe side of the border. These endeavours would serve as a means to better understand the karimba traditions in the rural borderlands as well as enrich and enliven the dynamic practices associated with Kwanongoma mbira.

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Appendix

Karimba Recordings from NE Zimbabwe and Mozambique by Andrew Tracey

25 May 1970, Goba, near Tete, Mozambique

HTFT783-T4-T1F2 “Tekateka ndikaripano” by Adolf Almeida

HTFT783-T4-T1F4 “Kariga uchabziona” by Adolf Almeida

HTFT785-T6-T1G5 “Ndapasaya pakuyenda” by Ketani Murinya

HTFT785-T6-T1G6 “Tikumbire fodya” by Ketani Murinya

HTFT785-T6-T1H1 “Nyakyparika” by Alfredo Johani (Nsenga type of karimba)

27 May 1970, Chief Chimpanda, Tete, Mozambique

HTFT788-T9-T1J1 “Siti” by Amos Zhuga

HTFT788-T9-T1J2 “Mbasare” by Amos Zhuga

HTFT788-T9-T1J3 “Karimare mare nomuromo” by Amos Zhuga

4 June 1970, Chief Tunduruir’a, Tete, Mozambique

HTFT791-T12-T1M1 “Mwera madzi koa” by Joaquim Kuyasa (Nsenga type of karimba)

HTFT791-T12-T1M2 “Ndatambira Ine” (I have received) by Joaquim Kuyasa (Nsenga type of karimba)

HTFT791-T12-T1M3 “Ondodyera Pangono Mpephete” (eat a little from the sides) by Joaquim Kuyasa (Nsenga type of karimba)

HTFT791-T12-T1M4 “Maramba Nkuru munanyi?” (why did you refuse the elder?) by Joaquim Kuyasa (Nsenga type of karimba)

Matepe and Karimba: 13 June 1969, Nyamapanda, Mudzi District, Zimbabwe

HTFT769-S8-S2E1 “Siti” by Chief Goronga, Johani Chiyeha (karimba) and Sinati Kadende (lead vocals and rattle)

HTFT769-S8-S2E2 (TR213-A2) “Kadyahove” by Johani Chiyeha Bandeira (karimba), Thomas Dzamwarira (matepe) and Sinati Kadende (lead vocals and rattle)

HTFT770-S9-S2E3 “Kunyangara kwawo Marembe” by Johani Chiyeha Bandeira (karimba) and Sinati Kadende (lead vocals and rattle)

HTFT770-S9-S2E4 (TR213-A1) “Kari muchipfuwa kanaziwa ne mwene wako” by Johani Chiyeha Bandeira (karimba) Thomas Dzamwarira Soko (matepe) and Sinati Kadende (lead vocals and rattle)

Hera and Karimba: 19 June 1970, Marymount Mission, Zimbabwe

HTFT793-T15-T1P1 “Marume azere dare” by Matias and Jackson Chidavaenzi (hera), Chaka Chawasarira (hera) and Raisoni Kanakombizi (karimba)

HTFT794-T16-T1P2 “Mwana wa mambo haanodaro” by Matias and Jackson Chidavaenzi (hera), Chaka Chawasarira (hera) and Raisoni Kanakombizi (karimba)

HTFT794-T16-T1P3 “Musumbu woderere” by Matias and Jackson Chidavaenzi (hera), Chaka Chawasarira (hera) and Raisoni Kanakombizi (karimba)

HTFT794-T16-T1P4 “Kwa msengu” by Matias and Jackson Chidavaenzi (hera), Chaka Chawasarira (hera) and Raisoni Kanakombizi (karimba)

HTFT794-T16-T1P5 “Kuvachenjedza” by Matias and Jackson Chidavaenzi (hera), Chaka Chawasarira (hera) and Raisoni Kanakombizi (karimba)

Hera and Karimba: 21 June 1970, Marymount Mission, Zimbabwe

HTFT795-T17-T1Q1 “Kuvachenjedza” by Raisoni Kanakombizi (karimba) and Dick Bobo Kadangerana (vocals)

HTFT795-T17-T1Q2 “Kanutamba mubani” by Raisoni Kanakombizi (karimba) and Dick Bobo Kadangerana (vocals)

HTFT795-T17-T1Q3 “Musumbu woderere” by Raisoni Kanakombizi (karimba) and Dick Bobo Kadangerana (vocals)

HTFT795-T17-T1Q4 “Murume azere dare/Chiendai kwenyu vaTonga” by Raisoni Kanako Mbizi (karimba) and Dick Bobo Kadangerana (vocals)

HTFT795-T17-T1Q5 “Mwana wa mambo haanodaro” by Raisoni Kanako Mbizi (karimba) and Dick Bobo Kadangerana (vocals)